

Youthwork Information Brief

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Career Pathways

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Mario comes into the office and tells you that he wants to become a nurse but doesn't know where to start. He is still in high school and is sure that he will have neither the time nor the money to realize his dream. What can you do for him? Can he start with a nurse aide program at the local career center and move on to the community college for licensed practical nurse and registered nurse programs? Can he go on from there to a 4-year college for a bachelor's degree and even master's degree?

Career Pathways Meet Youth's Needs

In other words, what Mario needs is a **career pathway** – a sequence of educational programs to prepare for a sequence of occupations. Each program would prepare him for immediate employment in a skilled occupation. Each program would also prepare him for the next level of educational program for a higher-skilled occupation. A career pathway could be ideal for Mario because:

- Each program is relatively short, so it's easier for him to finish it.
- Each program leads to a valuable educational credential or occupational skill credential, or both, which allows immediate employment.
- Mario can complete one program, get a better job with higher skills and wages, and "stop out" of school for a while.
- When Mario is ready to go back to school, he can fit right into the next program.

Mario's Career Pathway			
Occupation	Salary	Educational Program	License/Certification
Nurse Aide	\$19,000	2-Year High School Nurse Aide Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 450 class hours • 100 hours of supervised clinical experience • Possible 10 hours college credit 	Prepares students for state-required exam for Nurse Aide certification
Licensed Practical Nurse	\$33,500	1-Year Practical Nurse Certificate Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 credit hours • Certificate from college • Credits apply toward associate degree 	Prepares students for state-required exam for Practical Nurse license

Mario's Career Pathway (continued)			
Occupation	Salary	Educational Program	License/Certification
Registered Nurse	\$48,000	2-Year Associate Degree Program in Nursing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 credit hours • Associate Degree from college • Credits apply toward bachelor's degree 4-Year Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 120 credit hours • Bachelor's Degree from college 	Prepares students for state-required exam for Registered Nurse license
Nurse Practitioner	\$72,000	1- or 2-year Master's of Science in Nursing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30-60 credit hours • Master's degree from college 	Prepares students for state-required exam for Nurse Practitioner license

Program Articulation and Credit Transfer in Career Pathways

To make sure that students in one program acquire the knowledge and skills needed in the next program, courses and course content need to be coordinated between the two programs. This coordination, usually called *program articulation*, should include formal written agreements between the two programs that identify specific courses by name and number. Each program should have an articulation agreement linking to the next program:

- The high school Nurse Aide program links to the community college Licensed Practical Nurse program and Registered Nurse program.
- The community college Licensed Practical Nurse program links to the community college Registered Nurse program.
- The community college Licensed Practical Nurse and associate degree Registered Nurse programs link to the 4-year college Bachelor of Science in Nursing program.

Program articulation can also address another issue between programs – credit transfer. For example, students need to be sure that all 30 credits from a 1-year certificate program will transfer directly into the actual course requirements for a 2-year associate degree program – for example, the 1-year program's Communications 101 credit will be accepted for the 2-year program's requirement. Otherwise, students have to repeat courses.

Program articulation agreements between high school and postsecondary programs may provide for high school students to earn college credit while still in high school. Through dual or concurrent enrollment, high school students are also enrolled in college and earn both high school and college credit for identified courses, which might be taught at the high school or at the college campus. Early College High Schools use a particular educational model to maximize the college credits their students earn.

Finally, credit transfers between bachelor's degree programs and master's degree programs are not common. Usually, bachelor's degree courses do not meet the requirements for master's degree courses. If program articulation includes credit transfers, however, that is an added benefit.

What to Look for in a Career Pathway

When helping youth decide on a career pathway, make sure that the program moves seamlessly from one stage to the next. The program should have all of the essential elements required for the youth to be successful in reaching his or her career goals.

Career Pathway Checklist		
Essential Elements	Yes	No
• Does each program prepare youth for employment in a skilled occupation?		
• Do subsequent programs in the pathway prepare youth for employment in higher-skilled, higher-wage occupation?		
• Does each provide result in an educational credential (high school diploma, postsecondary certificate, degree)?		
• Does each program prepare students for a nationally recognized industry credential or a state license?		
• Are programs formally linked through articulation agreements (guaranteed credit transfer between programs and institutions, all credits meet the requirements of the next program)?		
Desirable Elements	Yes	No
• Does a high school program also provide college credit (through dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, Early College High School) to get a head start on college?		
• Does a high school program involve classes taken at the community college to make the transition to college less intimidating and easier?		
• Can students drop out temporarily during a postsecondary program (take a quarter off with out getting out of sequence)?		
• Are postsecondary programs designed to fit the lifestyle of working adults (evening and weekend classes, online course elements)?		

What You Should Do

Case managers must be aware of what programs are available in their area and the prerequisites for getting into them. Be sure that the youth is eligible for the program you are recommending.

Case Manager To-Do List

- ▶ Information on articulated programs can be found from local educational institutions:
 - Comprehensive high schools
 - Career academies
 - Joint vocational schools
 - Career centers
 - Community colleges or technical colleges
 - 4-year colleges
- ▶ Look for career pathways and articulated programs in any career area; do not assume that medicine and computers are the only fields.
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with articulated programs you find in your area.
- ▶ Steer youth into a program early when first developing the individual service strategy.
- ▶ Provide other program services as appropriate when the student “stops out.”

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